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**Testimony of Mark Barden, Co-Founder and CEO, Sandy Hook Promise Action Fund**  
**before the Public Health Committee**  
**Re: H.B. 5397**  
**3.28.22**

I would like to thank the committee, co-chairs Senator Daugherty Abrams and Representative Steinberg, as well as ranking members Senator Hwang, Senator Somers, and Representative Petit, for holding this important hearing.

My name is Mark Barden, and I am one of the founders of Sandy Hook Promise. I am also father to James, Natalie, and Daniel. On December 14, 2012 my youngest son, my sweet little Daniel, was murdered in his first-grade classroom at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The pain my family has endured every day since Daniel was taken from us is impossible to fully convey to you.

In the weeks and months following the shooting, I began working with other family members whose loved ones were killed that day to find a way to prevent other parents from experiencing the senseless, horrific death of their child to gun violence. The result was Sandy Hook Promise, an organization committed to ending school shootings and creating a culture change that prevents violence. Stated differently, we seek to increase safety, especially that of youth and children, in schools, homes, and communities.

Unfortunately, Connecticut still sees far too much gun violence. In 2021, 128 people were killed by gun homicides, unintentional use, and self-defense. Nine children were killed, and another 34 were injured.<sup>1</sup> These numbers are unacceptable, and as Daniel's dad, my heart breaks for these families. We must do more.

This general assembly has shown a commitment in the past to protecting children like mine from gun violence. Moving HB 5397 forward should be the next step.

By creating an Office of Gun Violence Prevention, Connecticut would improve its ability to collect and analyze data on gun violence. Treating this issue as a public health crisis would also lead to improved research that could help find new solutions. This data and research would be immensely useful to lawmakers and state officials going forward, as it would inform the future policies that are needed to reduce gun violence.

Connecticut communities need personalized approaches to reducing gun violence, and HB 5397 would make it easier for communities to have just that. The bill would establish the necessary grant-making framework to fund community-violence prevention programs. This would enable

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<sup>1</sup> Gun Violence Archive 2021 CT Stats. Gun Violence Archive. (n.d.). Retrieved March 17, 2022, from <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/congress/ct>



localities to implement evidence-based strategies to address gun violence at the community level. Programs would intervene to break down the cultural norms of retaliation and vendettas that often lead to community violence. They would also provide mental health support and social services to survivors and those who are at high-risk of being involved with violence.

Several other states have an Office of Gun Violence Prevention already, including Illinois, Washington State, New York, Pennsylvania and Colorado. It's time for Connecticut to make our children safer by doing the same.

The Connecticut General Assembly has acted countless times to prevent gun violence. But we can do more. It is time to improve the data available to the state, and to prioritize preventing community-based violence. I urge you to bring us one step closer to protecting all children in our state from gun violence.

I ask that the committee report house bill 5397 favorably. Thank you.